

ESID Working Paper No. 34

Politics, informality and clientelism – exploring a pro-poor urban politics

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May, 2014

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Abstract

This paper explores what we have learnt about how to instigate, negotiate or otherwise secure pro-poor government in towns and cities of the global South. With competition for scarce resources, the processes of urban development, and specifically the acquisition of land and basic services, are intensely political. While the nature of urban poverty differs, there is a consistent set of needs related to residency in informal settlements; tenure is insecure and there is a lack of access to basic services, infrastructure, and sometimes other entitlements. Households and communities have to negotiate these collective consumption goods in a context in which political relations are primarily informal, with negotiations that take place away from the transparent and accountable systems of 'modern' government. Clientelist bargaining prevails. Much of the existing literature is polarised, either critiquing clientelism for its consequences, or arguing that it has been dismissed without any grounded assessment of what might take its place and any considered analysis of what it has managed to deliver.

In this paper I explore how networks and federations of the urban poor seeking to access secure tenure and basic services have sought to advance their cause and the interests of their members. These organised collectives recognise that they have to challenge clientelist practice; however leaders also recognise that, given existing power relations, they have to work from within to change the realities of clientelism. Their own relative powerlessness means that confrontation is not an effective strategy. To strengthen their influence, they have to make common cause with those in need across the city building a unified and aware movement, and they have to establish their own legitimacy as agencies operating in the public interest and towards the common good. As and when they gain an increased influence, they seek greater flexibility from the city bureaucracy and to reduce the hierarchical highly vertical relations between the urban poor and the political elite. To maintain and extend their advances towards a pro-poor politics, they act to strengthen public accountabilities.

Keywords: urban politics, clientelism, participation, community organisation, citywide networking

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Aid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, DFID, which can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

1. Introduction

The problems of urban development in the 21st century have been clearly stated. In particular, there is a need to provide for the 900 plus million living in informal urban settlements without secure tenure, adequate services and safe and secure housing. The role of government is critical. Whatever the contribution of citizens themselves – and the importance of such contributions have been widely acknowledged – addressing the scale and depth of these needs necessarily includes the state. However, to date governments have, in general, failed to rise to this challenge. Nevertheless there have been some positive experiences which enable us to consider how progress might be made. This paper explores what we have learnt about how to instigate and embed pro-poor government in towns and cities of the global South. It recounts experiences, analyses emerging political relationships, and identifies contradictions and challenges. There are no simple policy recommendations offered here; rather this discussion recognises that politics is negotiated in its local context and relationships are rarely amenable to following recommendations offered by those not involved. The paper describes and discusses the strategies used by those on the “inside”, and specifically organisations of the urban poor, to inform our understanding.

Urban settlement reflects the economics of scale in production processes related to both manufacturing and service delivery. Residential densities are high, particularly in the inner cities; perhaps more significant is that the lack of formal residential neighbourhoods has resulted in the predominance of spatial informalities, as individuals and households settle in areas outside of those designated for residential occupation and/or contravene building regulations in the development of their dwellings. Livelihoods are commodified, with few opportunities for self-sufficiency, and individuals and households are dependent on the labour market to earn the money they need to purchase basic goods and services. There are many deficiencies in public services and goods, such as water and drainage. Low wages and limited opportunities mean that low-income households frequently use shallow wells for water, survive without adequate drainage and pathways, and deposit their faeces within the neighbourhood. In some cases, there are collective efforts to self-provide partial services.

There are considerable needs that require the involvement of the state and there is an intensity of political relations, both within such settlements and between these settlements and formal and informal political processes beyond their boundaries. The state, primarily local government, is generally present in multiple ways; and is as much related to coercion and illegal resource extraction as it is to the regulation of urban areas and the provision of bulk infrastructure to facilitate local access to basic services. Regardless of whether household occupation is on public or private land, the state may be involved in threats and negotiations around claim and counter-claims for both tenure security and improved access to services. Some services may

be provided, such as water through standpipes in or proximate to the area, or water kiosks. Perceptions and realities of crime may lead the police to enter the settlement. Politicians' need for votes at election time means that councillors and parliamentarians visit on occasion and concern themselves with local conditions, engaging local leaders and their organisations. Settlement organisations and leaders reach upwards and outwards to local government, political parties and other state agencies in their efforts to improve both individual and community opportunities. Local political elites outside of the settlement may also involve themselves in the settlement, sometimes initiating processes of collective decision-making, and/or improving access to public services, and/or exacerbating dependencies.

Much of the politics observable in informal settlements is itself informal, involving interactions and negotiations that take place far away from the transparent and accountable systems of 'modern' government. There is nothing unusual in political informality – and it is not solely associated with low-income groups adversely included within local politics. The continuing use of informal political negotiations and agreements among elite groups in the global North continues to be evidenced (e.g. with negotiations around tax agreement dominating UK political headlines in 2013) and points to an essential characteristic of political bargaining. In terms of labour market contestation between workers and employers, Scott (1998) points to the need to add flexibility around employment rules when he reminds us that 'working to rule' is an effective form of industrial action. Informal political negotiations appear to be a ubiquitous characteristic associated with political relations, rather than anything specific to or necessarily more concentrated in the global South. However, what has been acknowledged in the context of informal settlements in towns and cities of the global South is the dominance of clientelist bargaining. The discussion below explores how the organised urban poor have sought to transform such clientelist relations so that they better address local needs.

The existing literature on clientelism is polarised, either critiquing clientelism for its consequences, or arguing that it has been dismissed with neither a considered analysis of what it has managed to deliver nor a grounded assessment of what might take its place. This paper seeks to go beyond this dichotomy by analysing the strategies of groups that seek alternatives to clientelism, but who have to engage with those benefiting from such relations in order to realise such alternatives. My interest in making this contribution to the literature is to add to our understanding of how a more pro-poor form of government and associated political relations can be achieved. In this discussion, I use the experiences of networks and federations of the urban poor active over the last 20 years in seeking to access secure tenure and basic services – and analyse how they have sought to manage informal politics and with what effect. I seek to build on earlier contributions on this subject.¹

Prior to beginning this discussion, a brief reflection on definitions of politics may be helpful. I discuss politics in the terms considered by Leftwich (2008: 5):

¹ *Environment and Urbanization* 1993 and 2005; and references below.

[I]f it is to survive and prosper, any human community – whether a family or a federation – must have a means for making binding collective decisions: that means is its politics.

In the urban context, there is a considerable need for collective decision making, due to the multiplicity of activities, the interactions between such activities and the proximity within which they take place. However, the realities of urban life are such that an alternative representation is also valid; Foucault argues that “politics is war continued by other means” (Dean 1999; 25). Violence and the threat of violence are urban realities for many, as is the desire of one group to dominate local decision-making to their own advantage. In enacting politics, Leftwich (2008) distinguishes between decisions related to changes to the rules and changes in the procedures by which rules can be changed (i.e. the way institutions function), and changes to the activities that take place within the rules (ibid), and I return to this distinction in the conclusions.

This paper continues below in Section 2 with a discussion about the nature of clientelist politics and the alternative ways in which such politics has been understood. Section 3 discusses the methodological approach I use. Section 4 explores and analyses ways in which organised communities have sought to manage a clientelist politics to secure improved outcomes. I discuss four particular goals realised through diverse activities: negotiating bureaucratic changes and additional flexibility; managing conflict and contestation; mitigating the nature of vertical political-social relations; and transforming approaches based on resource scarcity into those that are more universal. Underlying these activities are, I argue in the concluding section, two more deeply embedded transformations: greater legitimacy for the urban poor and their contribution to urban life; and greater accountability between leaders and those they represent and/or act for.

2. The nature of clientelism and perspectives on this practice

The challenge of urban poverty and urban informal settlements is a familiar one. The urban poor are dependent on the market, both to earn their living and secure their basic needs. As noted above, in 2003 an estimated 900 million were without access to adequate shelter, living in informal settlements with insecure tenure and very significant deficiencies in access to water, sanitation, drainage and health, security and education services (UN-Habitat 2003). A more significant figure may be the percentage living in informal settlements – between 30-70 percent of residents in towns and cities of the global South (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013). Many residents are now tenants, and even squatters may have to make regular payments to those able to control the physical area. Dwellings may constitute a health risk, with a lack of basic services, poor quality materials and overcrowded rooms (Hardoy, Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2001). Income measures of poverty often fail to take adequate account of the costs of living, as households have to purchase their daily requirements

incurring additional costs, and non-food costs are significant (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013).

International data on access to water and sanitation point to systemic neglect and suggest that, while improvements have been secured, considerable deficiencies remain (WHO UNICEF 2012).² The public services that are essential for the meeting of basic needs are not provided and residents pay for informal provision for water and (in cases where it is available) electricity. Such provision is common, especially in neighbourhoods in which local governments have refused to supply services out of a concern that this will legitimate land occupation. Swyngedouw (2004) and Rahman (2008) describe the ways in which systemic disadvantage occurs in the cities of Guayaquil and Karachi respectively, with the lack of access to piped water being managed by powerful elites so they can benefit from the market in informal provision. Such manipulation at the city level is unusual; what is much more common is partial and temporary access facilitated by clientelist political relations.

Clientelism, or the use of the patron-client networks that link powerful social groups to the urban poor to secure political advantage for the former and limited resources for the latter, emerges from many studies of informal settlements in the global South. While this literature acknowledges that there are different kinds of clientelism, it has a particular focus on the exchange of partially provided public services (such as water, drainage or sanitation) and sometimes individual jobs or wages³ secured by community leaders for votes and other forms of political support. Clientelist relations have been described and widely critiqued in respect of their ability to undermine efforts to support inclusive and pro-poor urban neighbourhoods, and towns and cities (Peattie 1990; Pornchokchai 1992; Scheper-Hughes 1992; van der Linden 1997; Kabeer 2002; Wood 2003; Valença and Bonates 2010; Bawa 2011). The primary concerns are that such relations impose highly stratified social relations onto low-income communities, do not result in lasting and/or substantive improvements to infrastructure and services, and hence maintain the powerlessness and disadvantage of such communities. However, others have argued that such relations provide genuine resource transfers to the urban poor. Following a brief discussion of alternative definitions of clientelism, I look first at the case for clientelism and then at the case against.

² Note that in many cases now water is provided through kiosks and may not be affordable in sufficient qualities, even if the statistics include these households in those reached. See Dagdeviren (2008) for an example from Zambia.

³ Community leaders can be included on lists of municipal employees but not have to work, even though they get the income; in Argentina, they come to collect their wages at the end of the month and are known as *gnocchis*, since there is a tradition of eating *gnocchis* at the end of the month when incomes are running low because it is a cheap meal (see Hardoy, Hardoy and Schusterman 1991).

Hilgers (2011) concludes that clientelism is:

an exchange in which individuals maximize their interests, clientelism involves longevity, diffuseness, face-to-face contact, and inequality. That is, it is a lasting personal relationship between individuals of unequal sociopolitical status (ibid: 568).

She argues that it can be present with both democratic and authoritarian states, a conclusion that others broadly concur with. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 2) use a more precise definition, with clientelism being a particular form of party-voter linkage, a “transaction, the direct exchange of a citizen’s vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services”. Arias (2006, 429), in a study of the politics in *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, defines clientelism as “a set of unequal, reciprocal, non-institutionalized, face-to-face exchange relations...”. He argues that, in the context of Rio and the presence of drug trafficking, clientelist relations have evolved from traditional (rural) forms with a fixed patron⁴ into more flexible urban forms with regular shifts in the patron following negotiations with different potential individuals. Arias agrees that clientelism is linked to collective benefits in the form of tenure and access to services. In this discussion of pro-poor urban politics, I define clientelism slightly differently from Hilgers (2011) and Arias (2006), to emphasise that it is a many-to-one form of relationship characterised by inequalities in social status and access to resources with relations associated with limited longevity, personalised engagements and unequal exchange. While clientelist relations may be concerned with individual gains for the “clients”, such as employment for leaders and leaders’ relatives, the dominant form considered here is the exchange of political support (votes or other explicit acts in the case on non-democratic government) in return for collective benefits – primarily tenure security and access to basic services. The many-to-one refers to the nature of the hierarchy, in which many residents defer to a local leader, and many community leaders are subject to an individual higher up the political hierarchy.

Clientelist relations are particularly prevalent in informal settlements, due to the lack of services and the need to negotiate with politicians and sometimes officials to secure such investments. The state does not have sufficient resources to provide essential infrastructure and services. In the absence of universal access, politicians use personalised relations to manage protest as they buy off, co-opt and absorb pressure and protest from the urban poor. Towns and cities in the global South include formal neighbourhoods with better access to public goods and, in some cases, a reliable supply. Such citizens are less motivated to negotiate with local politicians and, having higher incomes, are likely to be able to assert their influence in other ways; see, for example, the discussion of their use of residents’ welfare associations in India (Harriss 2010). In informal settlements, the lack of access to

⁴ De Wit and Berner (2009, 931) also elaborate on the pre-industrial (ie. pre-urban) aspects of such relations.

basic services in a context of scarce municipal and/or utility resources encourages the prevalence of clientelist bargaining. Universal access for both formal and informal neighbourhoods, or programmes which operate at scale to improve informal settlements, threaten such arrangements and face a difficult negotiation with local politicians and power brokers (see SPARC forthcoming for a discussion of this in the context of toilet provision in Mumbai). As Chatterjee (2004, 38) elaborates in the context of India, many of the urban poor are only tenuously, ambiguously and contextually rights-bearing citizens. This is a context in which clientelism flourishes.

Clientelism has been institutionalised in many towns and cities with broadly agreed “rules” replicated across neighbourhoods. The clientelist relations discussed here are local to the settlement and urban centres. It may be helpful to recognise here that the political relations between residents in settlements and city governments should be differentiated from discussions of the patrimonial state. The patrimonial state refers to national-level government which has the characteristics of clientelism, corruption, rent-seeking, authoritarianism and instability (Kelsall 2011; Kelsall and Booth 2010, page 2). Clientelism is associated with both corrupt and rent-seeking behaviour but is not necessarily an unstable political process, indeed it is broadly recognised to be institutionalised. The term “patronage” is, confusingly, sometimes used as a synonym for clientelism, as well as being referred to within discussions of patrimonialism, and so is avoided here.

2.1 The case for ...

In the absence of adequate land for housing, services and employment, households develop strategies to secure patrons, building relationships with powerful individuals who help them secure access to needed goods and services. Patrons help residents secure access to the goods and services that they need and a typical return gesture is that residents commit their votes to patrons or to those that the patrons represent. Whether legal or not, patrons work within state structures that are broadly supportive of their role. The prevalence of clientelism reflects the benefits secured by local political elites through using this means to allocate scarce resources and secure their vote banks. The nature of clientelist relations is exemplified by Auyero (1999) when he describes the ways in which “patrons” in Buenos Aires deliver benefits to local people, both individual for leaders and residents in need (finding employment, securing essential medicines), and collective (simply enjoying themselves at rallies). Moser (2009) describes the ways in which clientelist relations may offer more substantive collective benefits through the acquisition of a range of essential services and infrastructure in a settlement in Guayaquil. Her account illustrates the functioning of clientelist politics within competitive political relations and a long-standing alliance between a residents’ association and a political party.

The arguments favouring clientelism value a pragmatic approach. They recognise that this set of relations offers something to the urban poor (Auyero 1999; 2000), and that more ambitious pro-poor interventions are ineffective or counterproductive. In part, this literature argues, they are ineffective because they fail to recognise the way

in which power functions, and the depth of entrenched disadvantage facing those living in informal settlements and others with low incomes in towns and cities of the global South. Such disadvantage exists even in a broadly favourable national political context, such that local manifestations of clientelism can exist outside of the patrimonial state and in broadly progressive political contexts. For example, in Brazil, housing investment has increased significantly with millions of dwellings being built, but experiences demonstrate the persistence of earlier clientelist relations (Valença 2007). Rolnik (2011, 244) reinforces this analysis of the situation in Brazil and argues that the failure of the Workers' Party to reform urban development reflects the dominance of business elites over urban development and their ability to maintain clientelist relations to further their own interests (ibid, 245).

Such experiences emphasise that local organisations cannot be extracted from their immediate political context; hence, even if such relations are contested, in practice they reproduce themselves despite the efforts of external agencies (see Devine 2007, 309, for a discussion of this in the context of Bangladesh; and Van der Linden 1997, 87, related to Pakistan). De Wit and Berner (2009, 930-931) suggest that the urban poor may prefer negotiating for benefits within clientelist relations rather than use collective action to advance their claims, because it works more effectively.

In addition to arguing that little else is possible, there is also recognition that making use of clientelist relationships is very much a part of the strategies used by the urban poor, and that representations of overwhelming and passive dependency are misplaced (see Robins 2008 for a discussion in the context of South Africa). While the urban poor are disadvantaged, such relations enable some engagement between the urban poor and the political elite: richer, more powerful, and better-placed individuals who make policy (Benjamin 2000; Auyero 2000; Robins *et al.* 2008; Bénit-Gbaffou 2011). Benjamin and Bhuvaneshwari (2001, 2 and 35) use the term “porous bureaucracy” to encapsulate their research findings from Bangalore and the ways in which “vote bank politics” open the possibility for community leaders to play a complex political strategy with councillors and high-level city politicians (Benjamin 2000, 44). Rather than clients being passive observers, there is a potential for community leaders to develop an active strategy to advance their interests (Amis 2002, 7). Bayat (2000, 546) describes how hundreds of informal neighbourhoods formed in Tehran and Cairo, despite state opposition, as a result of such informal negotiations. He also describes the non-payment of utility bills which takes place in many informal settlements, alongside illegal tapping of lines. The argument is that these are at some level permitted by local power brokers as part of an unwritten agreement. Bayat (2000, 547) discusses the potential for these to be acts of contention or challenges to the status quo, but concludes they are acts of quiet encroachment, involving the testing of boundaries that may or may not be negotiable. This argument recognises the ways in which the urban poor themselves have responded to the structural constraints and developed aspirations and effective strategies that reflect the opportunities open to them.

While Amis (2002) emphasises clientelism in the context of democracy, Castells (1983, 193) notes that, even within authoritarian regimes, the organised urban poor have been able to negotiate for concessions and secure improved policies and approaches by the state. Arias (2006, 430) also acknowledges the benefits secured by the urban poor through clientelist relationships during the “worst years” of the dictatorship in Brazil. Such engagements reflect inter-dependencies between the ruler and the ruled (Robins *et al.* 2008). Even in such dictatorships, the political elites require some level of acquiescence from those being so ruled and this gives space for some negotiation and redistribution.

Benjamin and Bhuvanewari (2001, 73-74) argue that such networks tend to be inclusive, rather than exclusive, as the power of the local community leader is in part related to their capacity to create an agreed position within the settlement and to bring local residents with the agreed position. Wust *et al.* (2002, 216) suggest that they are particularly significant for the lowest income households.

Benjamin (2004) argues that the professionalised national political elite in India look down on clientelism, as it is not a political process that is easily controlled by them and they are not comfortable with the outcomes. He argues that their critique reflects their own interests (and the urban visions and designs for the urban middle class), and such interests offer little to the urban poor (being as, if not more, disadvantageous). This argument is echoed by Simone and Rao (2012), who suggest that the struggles for survival and development by low-income groups are not well captured or represented by the plans of elites and the middle class in Jakarta.

2.2 The case against

However, even those who argue that clientelism has been too easily and naively critiqued and hence dismissed are frequently ambivalent about their own support. For example, De Wit and Berner (2010, 932) argue that, despite the empirical evidence that clientelism is of value to the urban poor, the underlying values and associated behavioural norms associated with clientelism result in the construction and maintenance of social inequality. Their perspective is consistent with the most common concern advanced: clientelism reinforces vertical authority, creating a stratified society that is anti-poor, with a considerable measure of political exclusion; is generally associated with a level of coercion that may extend to violence; and its benefits are insufficient (due to its dependence on resource scarcity) and unequally distributed, frequently to the disadvantage of the lowest-income and most vulnerable groups.

The case against clientelism recognises that there are gains, but also suggests that these are limited and come at some cost. The clientelist state pre-empts and prevents a political collective response by creating and reinforcing vertical relationships between leaders and the state, and between leaders and residents in informal settlements. There are many illustrations of the ways in which local protest is

controlled as a clientelist community leadership consolidated (Thorbeck 1994; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Garrett and Ahmed 2004; Henry-Lee 2005; Perlman 2010; Hossain 2012; Bénit-Gbaffou 2012). Despite efforts of governments to change these practices through specific urban poverty programmes, evidence suggests that the power of clientelist politics undermines such efforts. In Sri Lanka, for example, community associations strengthened through the Million Housing Programme began to negotiate for more autonomy, but political elites sought to undermine the local process and reinforce existing power relations (Russell and Vidler 1999). The vertical relations between the patron and multiple community leaders are replicated in vertical relations between those leaders and local residents – see, for example, Desai's (1995) discussion as to how residents in Mumbai avoid being too involved in negotiations with government, in case they are judged to threaten their leaders. Houtzager and Achyara (2011, 9 and 26) argue the lowest-income and most disadvantaged citizens are less likely to participate in local associations and suggest that may be because it is so hard to ensure that such associations are relevant to their needs. Findings about the ability of clientelist relations to “bounce back”, despite efforts to overcome them, are consistent with the argument presented above – i.e. that such relations cannot easily be changed.

A second concern relates to coercion and violence. The common practices of local leaders may create a climate of fear and, in such cases, politics and crime combine to advantage the elite. Henry-Lee (2005) discusses the situation in some Jamaican urban neighbourhoods, where political parties control electoral politics in low-income communities with high levels of gangsterism. There are overlaps with Bénit-Gbaffou's (2011) account of political decision-making in one Johannesburg settlement, when she specifically connects the desire of ANC activists to control political space with the physical violence that they use to dominate their political opposition. There are further examples of ongoing insecurity and fear, with a relatively small number of leaders able to exploit others to their own advantage using their political position to secure gains. Garrett and Ahmed (2004) discuss a survey of 585 households in informal settlements in Dinajpur (Bangladesh) to understand issues related to crime, violence and insecurity. One in six households experienced a crime, with 25 percent of these being severe beatings; and 26 percent of crimes were thought to be caused by local community leaders (*mastaans*). Banks (2010) highlights problems faced by businesses in Dhaka's informal settlements from *bhaki khay* or “to eat without paying” as *mastaans* require access to free goods and services; as a result, some traders prefer to operate outside of the settlement, despite police harassment.

The third issue is that if benefits are secured, these may not be available to the lowest income and most disadvantaged groups. Benjamin (personal communication) accepts that the benefits that are secured through informal negotiations may not reach down to all of the residents. Roy (2004, 160-163) discusses the gender implications of such politics as manifest in Kolkata and the ways in which women are excluded from party-managed patronage. This politics is recognised to reinforce patriarchy and women's subservience (Roy 2004; Scheper-Hughes 1992). A critical

point is that a clientelist process relies on scarcity and partiality – all cannot benefit (Van der Linden 1997, 83 and 85). And in the context of gains being only realised by some (a requirement for future bidding processes), those most likely to be excluded are those who have the lowest incomes and are at the greatest disadvantage.

2.3 Reflections

Implicit and sometimes explicit in the case against clientelism is the aspiration for alternative forms of social relations that are more equitable, hence offering greater opportunities for voice and inclusion, and with outcomes that are based on an analysis of need, rather than the political advantage of those already powerful.

Underlying some critiques of clientelism is a normative preference for more “modern” political relations. For example, De Wit and Berner (2009, 932) argue for “enforced impersonal rules for the allocation of resources” and Van der Linden (1997, 89) suggests that clientelist outcomes can be successfully challenged by a “centralized top-down approach”. This is a specific manifestation of a particular type of state-citizen relationship that resonates with an alternative literature on state capacity, in which the bureaucratic state is juxtaposed to the patrimonial state, with the former being viewed as better (more effective) than the latter. Whether or not it is better might be justified by objective evidence on effectiveness, but such evidence is hard to provide (Savoia and Sen 2012).

Whatever the apparent desirability of more modern and formal governance, as Benjamin (2004) and Simone and Rao (2012) suggest, bureaucratic government processes may also be profoundly anti-poor. Auyero (2010) describes the ways in which the urban poor in Argentina are controlled by an arbitrary and penal system of welfare benefits and Sabry (2005) discusses the intrusion of local officials into the lives of those applying to access such benefits in Egypt. More generally, the failure of subsidies in areas such as water to reach the lowest income groups has been recognised. These experiences suggest that, while clientelism is associated with vertical lines of authority, associated abuses of power and anti-poor practices, the same may be true of more bureaucratic forms of provision for poverty reduction. Esping-Andersen (1990) in his analysis of the welfare state in Europe highlights that such provision may be associated with continuing social stratification and stigma for those receiving assistance. At the same time, and as discussed in Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2014), such top-down poverty reduction programmes do not necessarily challenge clientelism in the short or long term. Experiences with top-down solutions to poverty may help to explain some of the findings of research to date, which is that organised networks of the urban poor do not see the solution to either poverty reduction or clientelism within such government-led programmes (see the discussion in Chapter 5 of Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014).

Faced with such multiple failures, Robins’ (2008) finding is understandable; he argues that in South Africa low-income urban communities shift between authority

systems calling on rights, traditional clientelist systems and modern governance to further their negotiating position and secure their needs and interests. This conclusion seems similar to Shatkin's (2007) discussion of the political activities of low-income informal residents in five communities in Metro Manila, the Philippines. He argues that while Alinsky-style organisers believe that they have made limited progress in a transformative politics, due to the "acculturation to patron-client ties and the daily realities of powerlessness and poverty" (page 88), in practice there are many forms of political activism, with local organisations following multiple strategies (pages 87-88). These arguments echo those of Chatterjee (2004, 56-60) in the context of India, who explains how squatters follow a set of strategies to strengthen their claims on land and public services. However, the ability of localised communities to overcome their political disadvantage is limited and in these countries there appear to be few options for a substantive pro-poor redistributive politics to reach scale.

The discussion below explores how city, national and international networks of the urban poor have been able to put together more effective strategies for political change. These experiences challenge the proposition that the primary political relationships available to the urban poor are limited to clientelism and the bureaucratic modern state.

3. The evidence base

The three interventions that provide the evidence for this discussion all emerged during the 1980s in Asia. Their work is introduced below and its significance is elaborated. I then explain how the findings for this working paper have been generated.

The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) is renowned for its work on low-cost sanitation. OPP began work in 1982, in what was then the spatially peripheral settlement of Orangi in Karachi (Pakistan) (Hasan 2006, Hasan 2008 and Pervaiz *et al.* 2008). Over time work has diversified and expanded as OPP have also developed projects on building materials, health and education, as well as undertaking a micro-finance initiative (with the Orangi Charitable Trust) and applied research on relevant urban development issues. Replications of their approach have occurred across Pakistan, with OPP support to city-based local organisations. In Karachi, OPP staff catalysed the formation of the Urban Resource Centre to facilitate networking between community organisations and to nurture a dialogue between these networks and professionals related to urban challenges facing the city.

The second intervention began in 1984, when a women's led NGO, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), was formed in Mumbai (India) (Appadurai 2001; d'Cruz and Mitlin 2007). As was the case with OPP, NGO staff exposed themselves to the realities of the urban poor and sought to learn from them. Within two years, SPARC had formed an alliance with an existing network of slum dwellers organisations, the National Slum Dwellers' Federation, and both agencies

established *Mahila Milan*, a network of women's savings collectives. Together they are known as the Indian Alliance. The methodologies used by the Indian Alliance have been taken up in both Africa and Asia. The relationships between these initiatives were formalised with the creation of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) in 1996. SDI now has over 15 mature federations and activities in over 30 countries, each of which draws together women-led savings schemes into settlement, city and national networks (UPFI 2012).

The third initiative is that of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, formed in 1987 as a network of NGOs and citizen groups across the continent (ACHR 1993). The initial task of the Coalition was to support those being evicted in the Olympic-related redevelopment of Seoul; this experience of solidarity resulted in agreement to formalise an Asian network and the Coalition was formed. The Coalition has augmented the work of its members through a variety of strategies and in 2009 launched ACCA, the Asian Coalition for Community Action. ACCA supports ACHR members in formulating city-wide strategies for the upgrading of informal settlements and improving the lives of the urban residents (ACHR 2011; Boonyabancha and Mitlin 2012; Boonyabancha et al. 2012).

These three interventions have been selected because of their substantive contribution to addressing the needs of low-income and disadvantaged groups. They have each made a contribution to improving the living conditions of over 100,000 households and have developed models of intervention that have been widely studied by practitioners, academics and professionals. Reasons that help to account for their success are explored in greater detail in Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2014); in summary these include technical improvements to shelter solutions and new financing modalities, together with social organisations able to pressure government and secure the reform of state policies, programmes and/or practices towards informal settlements to the benefit of residents. In this paper I concentrate on their strategies towards the transformation of political relations at the neighbourhood and city level.

This discussion draws together experiences that have emerged during the course of my interaction with these organisations over the last 22 years. During that period I have made numerous visits to each organisation and groups that they work with in both formal and informal settlements. I have collaborated with staff on research projects and assisted with documentation, sometimes drafting a contribution of my own and sometimes editing the work of others. My knowledge of these programmes has grown organically. It has been informed both by organisational principles, goals, contextual analyses and working practices as represented to me by key programme designers and managers and by exposure to local neighbourhood development, often with repeated visits to particular settlements over several years. My engagement with these organisations has been made easier by the continuity of the senior staff and community activists involved in this work and their ongoing work within these organisations. Although the roles of individuals have evolved, I have

continued to interact with the same group of senior staff throughout this period.⁵ Through these discussions, I have learnt from these individuals about their strategies, their successes and their failures and their analysis that accounts for these outcomes. This understanding has been augmented by the contributions of others, including community leaders, a wide range of staff in these organisations, networks, partner agencies and other collaborators. In particular, on a regular basis, several times each year, I have been exposed to the views of local government staff and politicians on these activities and associated developments. In addition to this, I have participated in, listened to and led discussions about the outcomes of programme interventions from a variety of academic and professional perspectives.

In the discussion that follows, I have cited literature that I have found insightful in explaining key activities and substantive outcomes. This literature has stimulated my own understanding of these organisations and their processes. This understanding has been built up through discussions in which explanations have been framed only to be improved and rethought. Over this period, these organisations have grown and been tested by both their own ambitions and external events. The countries themselves have changed considerably, as has the international context. Such changes have further helped to make my understanding more robust, although once more this understanding has been developed through dialogue with others who are more familiar with the organisational processes and outcomes described below. In terms of a methodological tradition, this research approach is very similar to the form of political ethnography described by Auyero (2006, 258); repeated encounters have enabled me to engage with the realities of politics as observed by multiple individuals who have offered me their insights into “...the texture of political life, and the plight of political actors”, as well as political processes and outcomes.

4. Social movement strategies to manage and then change clientelist relations

The perspectives of local community activists towards clientelism are almost universally negative. Residents are sceptical of the motivations of politicians, arguing that they show little interest in them outside of election times. They have also seen that the benefits communities receive in terms of improved access to services are both partial (very little is provided) and temporary (the improvements do not last). They are also aware that benefits are provided to the community leaders (from mobile phones to jobs) that are not shared by all; and that this is divisive within the community. At the settlement level, the result of such relationships is to establish hierarchies between residents and practices which reinforce the lack of accountability of local “leaders”. These individuals are not accountable, nor is it possible to hold them to account (see Arias 2006; Van der Linden 1997 for illustrations in the existing literature and Paperelas *et al.* 2012 for a discussion from the experiences of SDI/ACHR). The lack of accountability and partiality of provision results in increasing fatalism – people frequently hope for some form of assistance, but neither have belief

⁵ There are a very small number of exceptions, due to retirement and death.

that this can be secured nor that success is related to their own agency. The result is competition between groups within the city, with some being favoured at the expense of others.

Three responses consistently stand out when I ask local groups what they did and continue to do to respond to the kinds of clientelist politics that used to dominate their lives. Local activists explain how they have developed stronger local organisations with a leadership that is accountable to residents (and which are generally led by women). They explain how the mapping, surveying and then planning of informal settlements has produced public knowledge about these neighbourhoods and enabled a new kind of engagement with city authorities (Patel *et al.* 2012; Makau *et al.* 2012; Chitekwe-Biti *et al.* 2012). And they explain how as they have been exposed to the political relations that prevail in other settlements (as a result of city-level networking), their awareness has expanded and they become more informed of what is taking place in informal settlements across the city. As a result, they have been able to make alliances between neighbourhood organisations, and in some cases between a network of such organisations and other agencies, and have been able to consolidate the gains they have made. I elaborate on each of these strategies below.

Women within the SDI savings groups are clear that involvement in traditional forms of neighbourhood organisations offers them few benefits. Their conclusions are broadly similar to Houtzager and Acharya (2011, 3): in practice local associations add little to households' ability to access public goods and hence there is a need to develop an alternative form.⁶ Such traditional organisations are often dominated by men and are not open to women's participation (except in some cases on disadvantageous terms). Patel and Mitlin (2010) describe how as women became organised in savings schemes in India, they were able to renegotiate adverse relationships. This was because the savings schemes provided an organisational form for them to address household needs and so demonstrate their individual value in public roles. More generally, the experience of all three interventions is that alternative forms of organisation with a strong element of self-help improvement enable improved relations between neighbours to develop. Women-led savings-based organisations promoted by SDI involve around 20-40 plus households in each locality and have been effective in establishing local groups that are acceptable to local power brokers. In many localities, the women savers will go out of their way to make sure that the wives of the community leaders feel welcome to participate in the groups. These organisations are rarely viewed as competition by political elites, and

⁶ My argument is that civil associations have the potential to help citizens to improve their access to state goods and services, but the particular modality of organisation matters. These interventions have refined a particular type of association that enables low-income groups to negotiate to address their disadvantage in the urban context. This type does not correspond to any of those surveyed by Houtzager and Acharya (2011). Rather the type recognises the need to build a collective able to use self-help to build both knowledge capital (so that proposed solutions have been identified) and a political mass able to create new institutional links that evolved into sustained partnerships.

the accumulation of savings improves household wellbeing and creates livelihood opportunities alongside political negotiations (Mitlin *et al.* 2011). In Karachi the Orangi Pilot Project has used micro-level organisations of a similar size as the basis for the installation of lane sanitation; such organisations are able to produce an alternative set of political relations (Hasan 2006; Hasan 2008). (This NGO also recognised the significance of women's involvement in influencing household and neighbourhood politics, and has brought women together in health-related activities.) None of the interventions considered here believe that it is possible to secure pro-poor urban development without the state. However, all three support local self-help activities. The purpose of these activities is neither to replace the state nor reduce the scale of redistribution. Rather, it is a systematic response to the challenge of finding ways of working with the state that address the needs and interests of the urban poor. Local organisations are seen as important for developing alternative upgrading designs and urban development practices that work for low-income groups, reducing economic vulnerability in the case of savings activities, generally strengthening local organisations, and building practices of accountability between leaders and members. Local politicians, including councillors, see the way in which the urban poor are being aware and organised, and recognise this as a potential political force. Nyamweru and Dobson (forthcoming) provide a recent example of this when they discuss how savings-based organising has changed relations between the local government officials and urban poor in Jinja (Uganda) and, in particular, how the officials have responded positively to the provision of information as enumerations and profiling took place. However, local politicians are frequently suspicious and seek to undermine these efforts.

What do these experiences tell us about the formation of such new organisations? It has been difficult to catalyse such organisations and early replications in Karachi and South Africa suggest that a period of several years is needed. However, once a base is established with results, then other communities link rapidly to successful modalities of action and the process self-replicates producing more local organisations. Continuing support is needed, both to secure sustained effort and to build a critical mass, and it is rare that local initiatives are problem free. City federations frequently organise exchanges between peer communities to support local groups in their efforts to negotiate with local councillors, manage leaders who have absconded with savings funds and revitalise flagging activities. Evidence suggests that these are all things that city federations can, in general, manage. Important motivators for collective action are the real value of savings for women who are managing households (Mitlin *et al.* 2011), demonstrated improvements in basic services, and access to needed resources including small grants, loans and/or technical assistance. Another important element to support the process is that the state is not a monolith and interested officials and/or politicians can generally be identified who follow what the groups are doing, offer them legitimacy and sometimes resources, and help to explore alternative kinds of state and citizen relations (Parnell and Pieterse 2010).

As savings groups mature, then capital is accumulated into city and/or national funds to enable money to be lent across groups and more ambitious activities supported (Mitlin 2008a). These funds also become a tool to be used in negotiations with government agencies, who may be keen to expand investment in improved service provision in informal settlements that are consolidating as city neighbourhoods. Funds support precedent-setting projects that the communities wish the local authority to replicate. Savings and/or upgrading activities provide a focus for local organisations strengthening horizontal relations between neighbours and hence horizontal accountabilities. As savings activities grow, funds become a point at which formal institutions can engage the urban poor. For example, current discussions about the launch of a city fund in Harare highlight the political significance of joint City and Federation contributions to the capital; joint financial contributions lead to the need for a consensus on Fund objectives, and the terms and conditions of lending.⁷ The learning about activities supported by such funds combines with the public accountability used by the federations and networks to report on contributions and expenditures; as knowledge is shared publicly and practices routinised, relations change in response. In Jinja the process has moved to strengthening participatory governance with both a city fund and a Municipal Development Forum which provides a space for government and citizens to discuss proposed improvements and consolidate relations of trust. Nyamweru and Dobson (forthcoming) argue that such processes overturn past practices in which council funds were allocated by those with political connections:

The value of the federation approach is that it both convinces council they must be accountable to communities and also convinces communities that they have the right and the capacity to hold council to account.

A second consistent practice is mapping and surveying across settlements and the city. Mapping and surveying have multiple effects. These activities reach out to all residents at the settlement level, as every household, their dwelling and their access to basic services has to be included. Residents gain a sense of belonging through having a more public identity as their houses are numbered. Aggregated at the city level with a widespread dissemination that places this information in the public domain, the information has further value. It provides the basis to challenge myths about the urban poor that support an anti-poor rhetoric – for example, the information shows that the urban poor spend considerable amounts on rent and securing water, electricity and other basic services, and that the urban poor are not recent migrants, but have, in many cases, lived in the city for years and/or are second generation urban dwellers. The information enables the scale of state neglect to be evident. It is clearer how the processes of clientelism have divided local groups and resulted in community leaders having a neighbourhood focus and self-interested vision rather than strengthening citywide struggles against injustice and inequality. The information collected is immediately attractive to local government officials – and potentially politicians – who require this information to plan and implement.

⁷ This point draws on discussions in Harare, 30 April to 1 May 2013 and 17-18 March 2014.

Traditionally informal settlements have been ignored, as it was believed that informal tenure would result in evictions. Over time eviction is increasingly unlikely but continuing informality creates a zone of ambiguity. Local government recognises the need to increase its territorial reach, addressing policy and programme imperatives through formalising at least part of the activities within informal settlements, and the information is valued.

As maps and surveys are placed in the public domain, they provide the basis to strengthen accountabilities between formal political agencies and local residents, extending new horizontal accountabilities into more vertical relations.⁸ Mapping and planning provide the basis for a new set of alliances between organisations that build understanding, solidarity and which pre-empt the efforts of clientelist politicians to “divide and rule” the urban poor. Hasan (2009) describes how the mapping and collection of information about informal settlements alongside the route of the circular railway in Karachi enabled communities to defend themselves against redevelopment plans including evictions. In this context, the information had multiple impacts: community members have been able to present systematic knowledge about their settlements to a wide audience; community groups have challenged the cut-off date used by the government to establish the regularisation of these informal settlements; it has been evident that informal settlements residents are not responsible for the delays to project implementation; and communities have developed alternative plans. A further importance of mapping was demonstrated when local federation members in Kitwe (Zambia) presented the problems of sanitation in the informal settlement of Kamatipa to the council. The reaction of the deputy mayor was that conditions were so bad that the settlement should be closed and residents resettled. It was the ability of the groups to demonstrate that conditions were equally bad in other neighbourhoods (which they were able to do because they had collected information on all informal settlements in the city) which shifted the discussion onto action at the city scale.⁹

The scale of such mapping has grown considerably in recent years. For example, SDI affiliates (particularly those in India, Kenya, Namibia and South Africa) have now

⁸ In 2007, an official in Cuttack explained to Diana Mitlin how the Federation's list of urban poor settlements identified several that had been excluded from the local authority lists of those intended to benefit from government programmes. SDI's work in India has consistently demonstrated the importance of such surveys and mappings in challenging a preferential selection process when entitlements are offered. The broader significance of this became apparent when the World Bank delayed investment in Mumbai's railways because of the inability of the government to put in place a compensation programme that would enable entitled families to claim with an effective means to distinguish illegitimate claimants. The Railway Slum Dwellers Federation mapped each of the shacks in the area to be resettled and collected census information on each household. Any households was entitled to claim that they had been left out of this surveying and mapping process, but they had to show where their hut had been on the map and produce statements from each of the surrounding huts authenticating their claim to residency (Burra, Patel and Kerr 2003). Spurious claimants quickly fell away.

⁹ Kitwe, meeting with federation members, local councillors, deputy Mayor, council staff and staff from Nkana Water and Sewerage Company, 5 April 2013.

completed 6,500 settlement projects, 211 cities in which every informal settlement has been profiled, 4,015 settlements enumerated with the survey of all residents, 1,021 settlements in which GIS mapping has been used to establish coordinates (UPFI 2012). Chitekwe-Biti *et al.* (2012: 146) describe the changing attitudes in the Epworth municipality (Zimbabwe) as a result of the mapping and enumeration processes.

The third response is the way in which these changed local practices lead to new alliances across the city – and help to push forward attempts to secure redistribution at scale (see Patel *et al.* 2012 for a general discussion of this process in the experiences of SDI, and Appadurai 2004 for a discussion of the Indian context.). These alliances are within urban groups and beyond them. Numerous links (formal and informal) are made with government officials and politicians – and with other interested professionals. These are further facilitated by the direct links that local communities have with support professionals (Watson 2014). Within urban poor communities, as local groups map and survey their settlements and share the results, they begin to work together as a city network.¹⁰ In some cases, this is formalized, but even in this case much of the activity remains informal. These networks enable the sharing of information across the groups that are active in the city. As Boonyabancha *et al.* (2012) explain in the case of Asia such activities play an important role in consolidating collective action, and in so doing community networks represent themselves as a positive force for change in the city and declare their right to be present as urban citizens.

Such citizen-led city networks are also critical for consolidating learning through observation and action. For example, through network discussions the Thai savings groups that first took housing loans from UCDO (a government agency and fund) realised that best interests lay in negotiating for regularisation where they were living; they found that purchasing land far from the centre of Bangkok created livelihood difficulties and broke up their households (Boonyabancha 2004). Now 63 percent of those who receive support from CODI (the government agency that is the successor to UCDO) find housing on their original site, and 10 percent are within 5 km of their original site.¹¹ Such experiences are important in consolidating the political capabilities of the urban poor – enabling improved strategies to be developed, and further increasing the credibility of the organised urban poor with political elites in the city.

The work of city networks goes well beyond improved decision making for urban development, enabling grassroots organisations to make strategic responses to

¹⁰ Networking these organisations at the city level enables them to deal collectively with urban politics. Even where councillors are not in place, such as towns and cities in Malawi, urban centres are still major political centres with officials, local traditional leaders and national members of parliament all playing a role. Many goods and services, including public utilities such as water and sanitation, and significant resources, particularly urban land, are managed at the city level.

¹¹ <http://www.codi.or.th/housing/results.html> (accessed 2 June, 2013).

adverse political outcomes. As noted above, one of the benefits of strong local organisations is that they can manage local councillors who are reluctant to give up clientelist relations. In Iloilo, for example, the communities struggled to deal with a chair of the urban poor committee who made anti-poor statements. Community groups came together to develop a strategy. Together they made a resolution to ask him to resign as chair of the committee, which they passed to the urban poor communities; the resolution was signed by every group and passed to the media. This created an impact because there was no protest demonstration (which was what was expected) – just a statement of four pages. The network was successful in its goal.¹² Watson (2014) also makes reference to iteration between strategies of engagement and resistance.

The strengthening of the networks is also important because such mass organisations pre-empt conflict due to their scale. “We scare them because of our numbers. We must be listened to,” suggested one NSDFU member from Jinja. These federation members recognised that their willingness to include rather than resist council involvement is also significant to their success – and these themes are repeated in cities across Asia (Boonyabantha et al. 2012). However, as the account of network activity in Iloilo illustrates, alliances enable a range of collective responses to be taken. In the case of threatened evictions, alliances may use a more public contestation to protect neighbourhoods. For example, community networks physically gathered around Pom Mahakarn in Bangkok when the hundred plus households were told they were to be evicted.¹³ City alliances helped to protect settlements on the route of the circular railway in Karachi (Hasan 2009) when they were threatened with eviction, and protect the households living in Marlboro industrial workshops in Johannesburg.¹⁴

Alongside demonstrating solidarity, city networks help to prevent factionalism which occurs when political parties orientate themselves to addressing the needs of any single group (based on residential neighbourhood, ethnicity or political preference). As different powerful elites seek to consolidate their power they align with different local groups, creating divisions. In the Philippines, as described by Papeleras et al. (2012), NGOs have exacerbated this. These two community leaders argue that the process of self-organisation:

allows people in a community to begin working together, to strengthen relationships, to make communal decisions and to find solutions that come out of a collective process that is bigger and more powerful than only one person or one community or even one city. (ibid, 467)

¹² Personal communication, Sonia Fadrigo, leader of the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines. Initial discussions in Iloilo October 2008 and follow-up discussions at a workshop at the Technical University of Berlin, May 2013.

¹³ Community discussion, 26 February 2013.

¹⁴ <http://sasdialliance.org.za/projects/marlboro/> (accessed 2 June 2013).

The orientation of local self-help groups to city networks strengthens the awareness that individual and small-scale activities are important, but insufficient. Going to scale requires a more extensive collaboration with the state – and this consciousness leads to community leaders reaching out to politicians and state officials for a new kind of relationship. There is a consistent recognition that the state has a critical role to play in distributing resources, in mediating between different claims, and in regulating development. By January 2013, for example, the affiliates of Shack/Slum Dwellers International had 121 agreements in place with local authorities. These formal agreements are not seen as an end in themselves, but rather as the beginning of a new relation in which the legitimacy of the organised urban poor as a public agency is recognised by the authorities. At the same time, broader alliances are built with a range of other agencies, including NGOs, university and college departments, professional organisations such as lawyers and architects, and news and related media agencies, and key individuals with a public role in the city. This also contributes to greater public accountability.

These three sets of activities, refined into clear “tools” or “rituals” that embed practices replicated in many locations into patterns that can be understood and taken up by others, encapsulate the essence of the strategy to address clientelism. In summary, the strategy is to maintain community-driven approaches to doing urban development with bottom-up, incremental, informal settlement upgrading. If the local authority wishes to codify these processes with development programmes, then all these interventions would encourage such an aspiration. But there is an awareness that if such codification becomes standard-setting, then this is likely to work against very low-income and disadvantaged households. This strategy seeks to protect those living in informal settlements (or, as is the case in Marlboro, living informally in formal areas); the strategy also challenges the lack of accountability in informal politics. Efforts are made to make public the engagement of local authority officials and politicians. Information about activities, financial and other resources and agreements is spread throughout the networks and beyond. The stronger local organisations, the public representation of information and the multiple alliances create a context in which there is greater accountability of the state to its citizenry. This theme is returned to in the following concluding Section, after reflection on how these tools address the problems discussed in Section 2 above.

5. Reflections and analysis on why these strategies address the needs and interests of the urban poor¹⁵

Networked community groups recognise both the need for change and the significance of existing power relations that have to be overcome. Over time, a number of civil society groups have come to broadly similar conclusions about the strategies needed to overcome the structural forces that they have to face. The development of new strategies builds on the evident failure of past efforts – and may

¹⁵ Saward (2009) discusses more generally the validity of such claims for political legitimacy by non-elected individuals, and argues that they have an essential contribution to elective representation, including in the area of control and accountability.

help explain why authors such as Houtzager and Achyara, who have looked at more conventional forms of associations, have observed no relationship between associational participation and the improved quality of governance or democracy (2011, 26).

The belief of those participating in these efforts is that the design of approaches required to overcome the problems discussed in Section 2 has to address the structural disadvantage faced by the urban poor. And a key outcome of these structural forces is clientelism. Their strategies begin with recognition of the need to accommodate the existing political leadership within the settlement and the city. In including the existing leadership, saving-based organisation leaders recognise that power relations are such that the needs of the lowest income groups are unlikely to be addressed successfully if existing leadership is openly contested. However, while contestation with the existing leadership is avoided, activities take place alongside recognition of the need to prevent the existing settlement leadership determining the types and nature of political relations in the settlement and associated distributional outcomes. New local organisations are nurtured and the processes are designed to establish a level of collaboration with the state at the level of the city, while at the same time changing the underlying distribution of power, such that new practices and outcomes are possible.

The emphasis on the strengthening of collaborative relationships with the state is central to these interventions. However, while the language is often one of partnership, there is an understanding that this is not a partnership of equals. Effective pro-poor policies generally require more flexible state procedures and regulations – and a critical first step to secure flexibility is for local government (and sometimes national government departments and agencies) to recognise the potential of the organised urban poor. At the same time as establishing collaborative relations with local government, these interventions aim to consolidate the city networks – through drawing together broad alliances of local organisations – that are necessary to assist with countering imbalances of power. The mapping, surveying and planning activities help both to consolidate such alliances – and provide information that complements the relational power of city networks in negotiating for change. Such information encourages other groups, such as professionals and academics, to be more active and requires city officials and politicians to respond to a factual statement of the problem. In addition, the public knowledge of problems through the provision of information about the contribution that local informal settlement residents make to the city challenges anti-poor myths and prejudices.

These activities, and the demonstrations of self-help programmes, increase the legitimacy of the urban poor as urban residents/citizens, and evidence their potential as public agents with recognition of their actual and potential contribution. Co-productive solutions to urban services, such as community investments in sanitation and water, further demonstrate residents' willingness to be active participants in activities that address city governments' needs for a well-managed urban centre

(Mitlin 2008b). Such activities also allow for a diverse elaboration of the strategies preferred in individual cities.

Such local organisations tend to differ from traditional organisations in the following way. They commonly involved a different constituency. The members of these organisations tend, in the case of SDI and ACHR, to be women, who make up 70-90 percent of most savings schemes. Men may be more involved in specific activities, such as house building and information collection, but they do not take up a central role in savings groups. In many cases these women have not been previously active in local organisations; hence these organisations build political capabilities of a group that was previously inactive. The measures of success are different, with considerable emphasis being placed on resident interactions (measured through savings frequency) and material improvements to residents' lives. Traditional organisations generally place no emphasis on the former, and relatively little on the material improvements; although leaders may consider it important to be responsive to the needs of residents. Accountability is also considered important within these new local organisations; financial reports are given, information is publically displayed in community centres, and regular meetings are encouraged. However, it should be emphasised that there is a continuum between old and new.

These interventions and the groups that emerge do not challenge the status of the state. Rather, community members publically acknowledge the positive role of government and seek to contribute to its effectiveness.¹⁶ One reason for this is to avoid conflict. These grassroots organisations understand the need to avoid antagonising more powerful groups. The tensions related to resource allocation are never too far away, whether emerging through local tensions between residents over land allocations (Area 49, Lilongwe and Crowbrorrough, Harare), or between residents and the state related to land acquisition and occupation (Marlboro, Johannesburg and Harare, Zimbabwe), or issues related to political representation (Iloilo, Philippines). Sometimes such tensions express themselves in public protest. However, the experience of networked organisations in many cities is that such protests are not necessarily required – and in some political contexts such a public challenge is counterproductive. Community can get together to celebrate their achievements and invite the participation of state officials and politicians as easily as they can demonstrate in the streets or have sit-ins. Through such positive engagements, they encourage the political elite (local and city based) to recognise their potential as allies, strengthening the likelihood of pro-poor actions. The political elite are not challenged around their status – rather the reverse. They are encouraged to deliver according to that status – and they are invited to participate in ways that enhance rather than reduce their public legitimacy. The formal agreements proposed by the federations and networks demonstrate a willingness to build links with existing political processes and such agreements offer the beginning of a deeper and more substantive relationship. In some cases, city politicians see them as the

¹⁶ “Don’t think you have to break the existing structures, mostly you can make them work better for you,” was one lesson identified by a federation member from Jinja.

“end” – evidence they can show to demonstrate their commitment to the urban poor; it is up to the city network and their allies to manoeuvre their position such that formal agreements advance collaborative activities, and the politicians and/or officials understand that there are further advantages to a deeper engagement.

Observation suggests that the activities outlined in Section 4 lead to a rebalancing of power towards the urban poor. The political position of the urban poor is strengthened through: mass organisation through both networks and public activities by members; the public dissemination of knowledge about living conditions and local residents; the greater legitimacy that follows from the association of the urban poor with the production of this information and their demonstrated willingness to be active partners with government in improvements; the development of precedents that enable them to propose demonstrated alternatives; and the coming together of interested professionals and academics in alliances for change, due primarily to the greater knowledge of living conditions in informal settlements and convening potential that comes from its public presentation. Public dissemination of information encourages community leaders to be more accountable to their members, individual organisations to be accountable to the city network, and political representatives (and officials) to be accountable to city residents (generally their electorate). For example, as networks participate in public debate with the local government, information about the discussions and local implementation is made available. The costs of infrastructure improvements are disseminated and seen as benchmarks for the way forward. Politicians are encouraged to make public commitments and if they offer anything to one settlement, others in the network are informed.

Leftwich (2008) distinguishes between changes to the activities that take place within the rules, and changes to the rules and changes in the procedures by which rules can be changed (i.e. the way institutions function). This distinction adds insight into processes that are at work. A pro-poor grassroots politics requires community leaders to work within and change the realities (and rules) of clientelist politics, and their own relative powerlessness means that confrontation is not an effective strategy. For the reasons elaborated above, an open challenge is avoided and movements seek to be legitimate within existing terms and conditions, emphasising their multiple accountabilities, their value added to existing urban development processes and their commitment to responsible action, partnership and alliance building. In terms of the approaches to urban poverty reduction elaborated in Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2014), they are non-threatening to the political elites. However, their efforts try to change the rules of governance. Their effort to legitimate their great political inclusion and build mass organisations to strengthen their influence within such inclusion is evident through their actions and repeated in their discourse (Appadurai 2001; Papeleras et al. 2012). In this way, they challenge local outcomes and seek changes in the “rules” by which decisions are made with, for example, more formal inclusion in committees. Being included is a means to secure change. Strengthening local organisations and networking them across the city, they change the relational politics away from that required to maintain the rules of

clientelism. By making common cause with those in need across the city they build a unified and aware movement that has the potential to pre-empt the divisions required for clientelist bargains that “divide and rule” the urban poor. By demonstrating affordable alternatives to existing urban development models, they undermine the partial low-quality provision of infrastructure and services as communities, politicians and officials see how much more can be achieved if local residents are actively involved in infrastructure and service development. And by their demonstrated capability, practical interventions in the provision of information, and financial contributions they both challenge their low social status and build up their own confidence in their potential.

These organisations accept that their access may not necessarily be equal to that of others. In general they take a pragmatic perspective. They may believe that they should be treated equally but they aim for the political relationships that enable them to advance their interests (as recognised by Parnell and Pieterse 2010). At the same time, there is the acknowledgement that not each settlement and group can benefit immediately and that opportunities are limited. The resources sufficient for universal access to basic services and improvements at scale cannot quickly or easily be secured. In this context, what is important is transparent information and open processes that enable communities to be informed about opportunities and build collective strategies to advance their interests.

Federation strategies are not only built up from grassroots activities, but have also been supported by more top-down programming. However, evidence suggests that in this case the benefits are limited. Within the SDI network, the work in Uganda was first initiated through the actions and interest of central government. The work took some years to build a momentum and this only took place when the international network invested in nurturing grassroots capacity and re-orientating professional support. In Thailand, the modalities of a government agency, Community Organizations Development Institute, overlap with those of ACHR. Community networks were successfully established and developed some autonomy. However, it is notable that these networks responded rapidly to the opportunities raised within ACCA to nurture city-based community development funds, as they found these to be an essential additional component to strengthen the autonomy of their movement and reduce their dependence on central government funds. There are several significant experiences of such top-down programming particularly those of participatory budgeting. At some risk of over-simplifying the evolution of complex social relations and agency capability, it appears that participatory budgeting can strengthen existing civil society agencies (particularly social movements) and secure material benefits for residents, but it does not appear to result in the emergence of new movements able to be autonomous from the state (Avritzer 2006; Baiocchi *et al.* 2011). Experiences appear to be similar in the case of SDI and ACHR. However, it should be emphasised that these conclusions are tentative; what is evident is that there is a need for further research to understand the ways in which organised citizens strategise with respect to the state and how urban social movements can

maintain their momentum, and deepen and extend their ability to represent the needs and interests of their members.

In closing, it should be emphasised that the broader context remains difficult. These activities take place within patterns and models of urban development that favour higher income groups and an anti-poor politics, and this is particularly strong in two ways. The first is when the activity is designed (or, in the case of the above, re-designed) for individual citizens, resulting in the individualisation of citizen-state relations. This makes it more difficult to advance collective interventions aimed at achieving the public good alongside private gain. Projects aimed at individual households favour approaches based on the market and are advantageous for those who are better off. Such models mean that collective endeavours may be looked down on. For example, there is an increasing emphasis on individualised (household) access to services, and in this context the organised urban poor may struggle to create and sustain options for collective management. However, there is a political cost if individualised access to service delivery predominates. Local action becomes less relevant, residents are less likely to be involved in the organisations and therefore the leadership of residential organisations is under less pressure to be accountable. With a less accountable local leadership, the representative foundations for city networks are weaker. The second direction is the increasing stratification of urban areas in some cities. The organised urban poor are seeking to create new options for integrated urban centres. However, higher income households may see that their interests are better served by excluding the urban poor. As elites perceive that they can realise their interests through such spatial divisions, then it may become harder for a progressive alliance to be secured.

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